Original Paper

Research on the Contributions of Teachers' Intervention to Language Learner Autonomy

Yawen Sun[1*]

[1] Faculty of Humanities, Yantai Institute of Science and Technology, Yantai, China

[*] Yawen Sun, E-mail: ssyywwok@yeah.net

Introduction

It is not the latest issue of promoting students' autonomous learning in language education (Duarte et al., 2016). It has received much concern from experts and scholars in the second language acquisition field (SLA) (Smith, 2003). Learner autonomy is first defined by Holec (Milosavljević, 2017). He proposed that learner autonomy means that students can decide the learning content, and methods, track the progress, and evaluate the learning outcome by themselves (Holec, 1981 cited in Milosavljević, 2017). In other words, it means the ability of someone could take charge of his or her own learning (Duarte et al., 2016). However the issue of the role of teachers in promoting students' autonomous learning and what degree they intervene in language teaching class, the concern was less than learners aspects (Smith, 2003). This involves "teacher autonomy". The teachers' capability to conduct autonomous teaching (Smith 2000, Savage 2000 cited in Smith, 2003). As an autonomous teacher, they are responsible for their teaching process, continuous reflection and analysis, depending on cognitive and affective skills to control the class reasonably (Little, 1995; cited in Smith, 2003), helping students cultivate autonomous ability. In fact, the teacher function is essential, learner autonomy development rely on teacher autonomy development (Little, 1995), because, on contrast, the students cannot foster independent learning skills if his or her teacher do not know what learner autonomy is (Little, 2007). Educators play a crucial role as a facilitators in promoting learner autonomy. For university students, they have mature cognitive capability and world knowledge, how to sustain students' s awareness of autonomous learning and the habits of autonomous learning is particularly important. For learners of other ages, how to cultivate the awareness and habits of autonomous learning seems especially important. This paper focuses on, regarding learner autonomy as the teaching goal, and to what extent intervention by teachers in the teaching process can promote learner autonomy and improve learners' autonomous capability and awareness.

1. Teacher Autonomy

Regarding learning a language, the teaching process is bidirectional, even though the pedagogical objective is the students, it also includes teachers. Therefore, the responsibility for fostering learner autonomy, students and teachers both have the duty to make effort (Milosavljević, 2017). This reveals part of the nature of learner autonomy: learners and teachers sometimes complement each other. Teachers' laissez-faire does not mean that students are completely autonomous, and teachers' language teaching management does not mean that students do not have the opportunities for autonomous learning. Just like the above has stated, teachers need to know what autonomous learners are and master the degree of intervention to students. To achieve this, they need to know the pedagogy of how to foster learner autonomy and make sure themselves engaged in processes of guide them in autonomous learning (Smith, 2003). In the stage of teaching, in general, teachers need to know students' learning needs so that should provide the proper self-directed learning environment and material to acquire the knowledge (Littlewood, 1996, cited in Duarte et al., 2016). They need to cultivate the awareness of the freedom not to control others, which pointed out the essence of teacher autonomy (Smith, 2003).

2. Degree of Teachers' Intervention

When teacher as the educators and facilitator to promote learner autonomy, in three governed principles of SLL and FLL ask learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use (Little, 2001), require students focus on their own learning, manage schedules, select the learning activities and materials, involve in interaction and evaluate the outcomes (Little, 2007), but, at the beginning of cultivating their autonomous learning, it depends on educator' capability to support interaction between himself/herself and class, groups, and students individuals (Little, 2007). It does not say autonomous learners learning do not need teacher, especially at first (Duarte et al., 2016). In this stage, teachers should guide students and make some control. It is difficult for learners in the first class can take charge of their learning (Little, 2007). The teacher should identify what activities and areas that learners can make decision by themselves form the first day, and what cannot be. For example, the simple pronunciation and letter writing activities could be the first choice. And this is the key characteristics of Situational Language Teaching and Audiolingual Method that listening and speaking is primary, reading and writing is secondary. In addition, complex or multi-tasks such as role play, retelling movies, make new conservation are also unsuitable activities in their beginning classes. The challenges that the students make for themselves should but once they get the ability to autonomous learning and are ready to manage themselves in language learning, the teacher should remove the control (Little, 2007). Of course, Dam (1995) offer a paradigm of implement process in the specific teaching. He discussed that teachers have the obligation to intervene them if their studying lead to the wrong way or run into a bind alley, in particular, they do not set a most ideal challenge for themselves (Dam, 1995). The challenges set by students should conform to the concept of "Zone of Proximal Development" in Second

173

Language Acquisition (SLA) (Saville-Troike, 2008). Sometimes, teachers can timely adjust students' too high or too low learning challenges or goals so that maximum improve their learning effects and motivation.

3. Teachers' Intervention in Learning Strategies

Moreover, the teacher should provide advice and procedures beyond their level and experiences, which can give them the class motivation, constantly work harder, then make higher achievement (Dam, 1995). To make them more independent, persuade them that they are good enough and have the ability to be more independent, give them successful independent learning experiences, and also provide the opportunities to practice and exercise themselves in learning, as a result, they can use useful strategies to effective language learning and check their learning process from time to time (Milosavljević, 2017). For learning strategies, teachers can give them some guidelines to make them use suitable and correct learning strategies in their learning, focusing on different learning content. For instance, learning long and difficult sentences allows students to retrieve previous knowledge and memorize them based on understanding. For learning vocabularies, students can learn them through a combination of multimedia and visual memory. Deepen comprehensive understanding of word spelling, pronunciation, fixed combinations, and expression based on visual, auditory, and sensory senses. For learning English dialogues, teachers can provide context related to daily life and choose situational dialogues for students to create and practice on their own. Random dialogue can also be used, such as randomly selecting a dialogue mode and randomly selecting peers to engage in dialogue, to enhance the fun of conversation teaching and enhance students' awareness and ability for autonomous learning. For learning grammar knowledge and key points, can be set after learning basic words and phrases. Students can be guided to learn autonomously and summarize language points through discovery learning and exploratory learning. In short, using inquiry-based learning and induction-based grammar learning is another major teaching strategy or autonomous learning strategy to promote students' autonomous learning.

4. Teachers' Intervention in Learning Activities

It is complex to grasp the degree during the process of promoting learner autonomy for teachers. At first, teachers should gradually deliver the strategies and knowledge to help them autonomous learning. In the latter stage, with the language learning deepen, teachers control and intervene can release compared with the former situation. Thomsen (2003) pointed out that when they already have a certain proficiency, they can conduct intensive group work, pair work, using target language, not only that, they also can use learned conceptions to analyse their learning outcomes (Little, 2007), in other words, they can independently input and output. For target language use, group work and wring are the successful representation of that, teacher can apply group work in autonomous learning class. Only through group work and intensive use of language in interaction and communication, which follows the

174

Vygotskian principles, can learners proactive make language into their mental resources (Thomsen, 2003). This is the adoptable methods for relatively advanced learners. Consequently, less control brings to self-learning and learning from each other. On the other hand, writing is also a beneficial support for students' autonomous learning (Little, 2007). In autonomous classroom, it has three implementations: "to make posters that summarize learning plans or list useful vocabulary, idioms or grammatical structures; to maintain journals or logbooks in which learners capture the process and progress of their learning; and to produce various kinds of written text as the output of group projects" (Little, 2007, pp. 25-26), At the same time, the learning diaries written by students can be an activity or form of class display. Teachers can post them in the sharing column at the back of the classroom to exchange self-learning experience, learn effective learning methods and encourage each other. Using these autonomous and interesting activities, the written texts can promote speaking, in the meanwhile, with speaking skill enhancement, the writing also have writing resource stem from speaking (Little, 2007). Self-regulation and self-summarize like writing learning plans, summarize useful grammar and vocabulary, they can clearly know their merits and demerits and adjust future direction based on previous work. In addition, the group work and writing combined use not only can be occur in later stages, in the beginning stages, through writing it down, groups generate a writing work, peer correction, and self-correction, they will know more linguistic forms and their literacy will be enhanced (Olson, 1991 cited in Little, 2007).

5. Teachers' Intervention in Learners' Thinking

The important role of teachers in effective autonomous learning also embody in teacher action, teacher should provide good resources which students can use and conduct the activities in an autonomous way as much as possible (Trindade, 2010, cited in Duarte et al., 2016). Also, the tradition teaching way emphasize the students' acceptation, it is teacher-centred, students have always accustomed to teachers deliver and they receive and do not critically think (Little, 2007). Besides, teachers also think they cannot independent learning (Little, 2007). So, teachers should to stimulate the sense of presence, which indicate them the main body is them, encourage them to make comments, adapt their demands and different opinions in any activities and ask them point out the exploratory question as well, integrate their suggestions to teaching plans (Little, 2007). As a result, the class and students are both will be more initiative. Furthermore, there is a relationship between autonomy and language proficiency (Benson, 2007), it shows that the demands of autonomy more rely on the specific stages and tasks (Benson, 2007), it means that, students' language level influence teachers' autonomy methods choose and implementation. Teacher treat different students need to use diverse forms and methods promote their autonomy. Less autonomous students more emphasize the language acquisition, but, all the students' language acquisition can be in the initiative way and promote their autonomy to learn by teachers' provided chances (Duarte et al., 2016). Communicating with less autonomous students in natural and acceptable way could naturally improve their language ability but no boring,

175

nervous, and anxious. For autonomous students, teachers can assign some challenging conservation In a word, the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical methods in autonomy, be careful the degree of intervening, meanwhile, concern the different stages and individual differences, learner autonomy will be improved. The students can eventually do self-learning and regulate their own learning, obtain the independent leaning skill (Milosavljević, 2017).

6. Personal Experiences for Autonomous Learning

In the process of practice, there are so many real situations of different degrees of teacher autonomy in teachers in language class and students' autonomous learning sometimes be promoted and sometimes restrained. I remember when I was a high school student, the classes, assignments and different kinds of exams are very loaded, putting a large pressure to everyone including me as well. Also, we have a couple of hours in the daytime and evening for autonomous learning, our head teacher is afraid we would be very tired and wants to ask us to have a break, she would play a piece of music, especially soft music during our studying, or ask us to close the eyes, the head lies on the desk relax with music playing. This way makes us release ourselves when we have many things need to deal with. And let me feel inner peace at this moment every time. As a result, I can always concentrate on learning again, the effect would also be better. Although this is just an inconspicuous method, during autonomous learning, the teacher creates a favourable environment for students and this method reflects the teacher as the facilitator supports and promotes learner autonomy. Besides, different subject teachers go to the class in turn during the evening self-learning time every day, for example, Monday is math teacher, Tuesday is English teacher, Wednesday is politics teacher…the teacher would sit in the back of the classroom, if someone has the questions related to this subject, they can ask the teacher for help. This is a method applied in the autonomous learning not only include English language, teacher need to grasp the degree of the control but also need to provide the guides and help during their autonomous learning. for instance, English, this method offers the opportunity for students to ask suggestions, teacher help them adjust their learning plans, during their self-learning, the teacher can depend on their needs giving them targeted help so that promote their autonomous learning. Except these my real experiences, I also heard my friend who teach Chinses in Korea, she said as she teaches advanced learners, so sometimes, she will leave some class content in coursebook to students, setting some groups, the students in one group will be the teacher, preparing the class and teach other students. This is very interesting activity during the semester, because they are not always listen the teacher. They can change the role to teacher and practice, by applying the learned knowledge. During this process, they exercise their courage, improve their language comprehensive skill. In addition, their group preparation is also the autonomous learning process, through their collaboration and autonomous studying deliver the knowledge to their classmates. Moreover, my former teacher will design interesting teaching content for us to promote our autonomous learning, such as listening class. For the content to be learned in this class, the teacher will select relevant English songs for students to listen to, understand the main idea of the lyrics, tell us the

relevant idiom expression or culture, and explain the words that need to be learned. After the students are fully interested in and understand it, tell us to dictate this song in the next class. This teaching design not only enables us to learn the language points we have learned and the local culture of English but also enables students to actively listen to songs, learn English and feel the language in the context of the real world. In the process of listening and dictate to the song again in the next class, I deepened my understanding for song and learned a song at the same time. This is the charm of autonomous learning.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, as it is widely known that learner autonomy is an important aspect and goal in language learning, teacher autonomy as the concept which has a close relationship with learner autonomy obtain more and more concern form educational specialists and worldwide. This essay mainly focusses on how the teacher intervene students is best promoting learner autonomy. First, it introduces the what is learner autonomy and teacher autonomy as well as their relationships through relevant literature, then in the first main paragraph, it briefly refers to why teachers need to have pedagogy of teaching students' learner autonomy, and why they need to master the degree of control in language teaching. Then, the essay discussed in the different stages of language teaching and learning, what points the teachers should concern in promoting their autonomous learning, emphasizing some specific situations how the teacher cope with, for example, learners in at beginning and latter stages, the general methods and principles using in teaching, mainly talk about some good methods like group work and writing. After that, due to real language class consist of teacher and different students, the essay stated that teacher should concern methods and activities using in different learners. The degree of intervenes is largely distinct. What is more, in the meanwhile, increase their sense of presence, cultivating their independent learning skills and awareness. In the final part, I offer some experiences and the experiences in my surrounding, discussing the real methods teacher used in language class with the purpose of promotion of learner autonomy. It refers different context like China and Korea. That is successful implementation in life. But, the more studies and research need to conduct in learner autonomy.

References

Benson, P. (2007). Autonomy in language teaching and learning. *Language teaching*, *40*(1), 21-40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444806003958

Dam, L. (1995). *Learner Autonomy 3: From Theory to Classroom Practice*. Dublin: Authentik.

Duarte, M., Leite, C., & Mouraz, A. (2016). The effect of curricular activities on learner. autonomy: The perspective of undergraduate mechanical engineering students. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, *41*(1), 91-104. https://doi.org/10.1080/03043797.2015.1056101

Little, D. (1995). *Learning as dialogue: The dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy*, *23*(2), 175-181. https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(95)00006-6

Little, D. (2001). We're all in it together: Exploring the interdependence of teacher and learner autonomy. In L. Karlsson, F. Kjisik, & J. Nordlund (Eds.), All Together Now. *Papers from the 7th Nordic Conference and Workshop on Autonomous Language Learning*, Helsinki, 7th, September, 2000. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, language Centre, pp. 45-56.

Little, D. (2007). Language learner autonomy: Some fundamental considerations. Revisited. *International Journal of Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *1*(1), 14-29. https://doi.org/10.2167/illt040.0

Milosavljević, N. (2017). IMPORTANCE OF AUTONOMY IN ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, *5*(3), 509-514. https://doi.org/10.22190/JTESAP1703509M

Saville-Troike, M. (2008) *Introducing Second Language Acquisition.* Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Smith, R. C. (2003). Teacher education for teacher-learner autonomy. *Papers from Three IALS Symposia (CD-ROM).* University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh. University of Warwick: Centre for English Language Teacher Education (CELTE), 1-13.

Thomsen, H. (2003). Scaffolding target language use. *Learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom: Teacher, learner, curriculum and assessment*, 29-46.